

VZCZCXRO8089
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHRB #1204/01 3661641
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 311641Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9502
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 3557
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 4437
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1109
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0880

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 001204

NOFORN
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IPA - PAYTON KNOPF, NEA/MAG AND IO/UNP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2018
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: GAZA ANGER GROWS; SCHOOLS SHUT

REF: RABAT 01202

Classified By: DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: Moroccan public and official response to the recent Israeli air strikes in Gaza continues to be universally critical of Israel and, increasingly, the United States. Almost every article, statement, and interlocutor has used the word "disproportionate" to describe the action. Media reports indicated that schools took the unusual step of closing in protest. At the same time, there has been little mention of HAMAS's recent unilateral decision to end the cease-fire or to resume of rocket attacks on southern Israel. King Mohammed VI and his government, while clearly critical of the events, have been careful to moderate their remarks to avoid inflaming sentiments. The overall tone of individuals quoted in the media and in comments posted in Morocco's Arabic-language blogosphere has been more demanding of a concrete response from Arab leaders and the broader Arab masses than in past instances of Arab/Israeli conflict, such as the summer 2006 Lebanon war. In support of USG efforts to achieve a cease-fire, Mission delivered points conveyed in Acting A/S Feltman's email of December 30. End Summary.

Clear but Modulated Official Criticism

¶2. (SBU) King Mohammed VI, in his capacity as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, condemned the airstrikes and the "disproportionate use of force and the tragic escalation of violence." In a communique issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MFA), he called for an immediate halt to hostilities and asked the UN Security Council and the Quartet to facilitate dialogue. The Rabat-headquartered Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) published a similar statement on its website but only in Arabic. In a break with its standard practice, the AMU did not make a French version available. Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri, in a statement on the margins of a December 30 meeting of Maghreb Foreign Ministers in Tripoli, expressed hope that the December 31 conference of Arab Foreign Ministers in Cairo would lead to "concrete results."

Stinging Public and Media Anger

¶3. (SBU) Arabic and French-language dailies continued to use strong language and graphic images in their front-page

coverage, with today's focus shifting to popular protests, school closings, and sit-ins across Morocco. Independent French-language daily "Aujourd'hui le Maroc" headlined, "Israel refuses calls for a cease-fire and pursues carnage in Gaza." Al Jazeera also reported that Moroccan public schools were closed today to protest the Israeli attacks, with thousands of students in most Moroccan cities taking to the streets to express their anger and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

¶4. (SBU) The moderate, Islamist, Party of Justice and Development (PJD)-affiliated Arabic-language daily "Tajdid" reported on a large PJD-led demonstration in front of Parliament in Rabat with people carrying signs in Arabic reading "no to international silence." (Comment: In a welcome departure from prior practice in reporting on Israeli action, Tajdid (under the editorial leadership of former Humphrey Fellow Mustapha Khalfi), is quoting other organizations rather than editorializing itself in news articles on the front page. End Comment.) Tajdid quoted Abdul Hai Amor, Chairman of the Scientific Council in Fez, as saying that the Israeli action justifies and requires Arabs to wage "defensive jihad" in response.

¶5. (SBU) The December 24 edition of Tajdid has a picture of the poster for the new Adam Sandler comedy "You Don't Mess with the Zohan" about a Mossad agent turned hairstylist juxtaposed with a picture of a family carrying a dead child wrapped in the Palestinian flag. Below the montage is a cartoon of a Palestinian man throwing a shoe, into which he has slipped a bomb, at an Israeli soldier. More recent articles reflected growing outrage over the inability to

RABAT 00001204 002 OF 003

deliver humanitarian aid to victims due to the Israeli blockade. Independent Arabic daily "Al Jarida al Oula" stated that, "It would be better for King Abdullah of Jordan to save his blood donation, for it will not reach the besieged Gaza; and (he should) just decide to expel the Zionist Ambassador from Amman." Tajdid also, for the first time, mentioned HAMAS rockets, but cast them as homemade tools of a scrappy and outgunned resistance. The paper also prominently featured letters from readers encouraging citizens to collect and send aid to the territory.

U.S. Attracts Barbs

¶6. (SBU) Independent Arabic-language daily "Al Massae" continued its criticism of the U.S. in today's editorial, extending its criticism to First Lady Laura Bush for calling the recent shoe-throwing incident in Iraq an act of aggression, but for not speaking out against Israeli strikes. Several moderate dailies also blamed the passivity of fellow Arab leaders. Al Massae opined, "All Israel's victories were achieved because of Arab regimes." Pro-palace French-language daily "Le Matin" wrote that the U.S. is responsible for "the hurricane of state violence." Al Massae also reported that students targeted McDonalds during protests in Casablanca. Semi-private television 2M aired coverage of the protests as well, but declared that the official position of the U.S. is unlikely to change. The U.S. was criticized again today by Istiqlal (nationalist) Arabic-language daily "Al Alam" for "backing the new holocaust."

Mission Observations

¶7. (SBU) Consulate Casablanca reported that on the night of December 30, at some point after evening prayers, a number of students attempted to protest the Israeli actions in Gaza in front of the McDonalds in the Maarif neighborhood. The gathering was quickly broken up by the Moroccan authorities.

Moreover, on the same night in the Place Des Nations Unies neighborhood, students painted over the "Place Des Nations Unies" plaque to read "Place De Gaza". Casablanca ConOff heard that in Tangier, the police presence has been robust in order to quell student protests. Consular contacts have speculated that the protests have not been more widespread to date because many students are on holiday. Rabat PolOff observed increased and visible police presence on the approaches to Embassy Rabat and in the area around Parliament on December 31.

Mythology is the Enemy of Humanity

¶8. (C/NF) Raffi Erwihan, the secular, westernized, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Justice Judicial Training Institute and a high ranking judge told PolOff that hardliners on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the conflict were "clinging to their mythologies of the past" and were "enemies of humanity" who were leading their people to death. He said that Moroccans were angry about the perceived disproportionality of the Israeli response to Hamas rockets. In the December 30 conversation, Erwihan added that there was a perception during the Lebanon conflict that there was at least an Arab resistance able to stand up for itself. "Now, it's just endless images of children dying," he said. "I am not radical, religious or political," he said, "but the pictures are difficult for me to see." He said that the current gallows joke circulating "in the street" has a Gaza resident lifting his head groggily from the rubble saying, "I knew someone would have to pay for those (expletive) shoes (in Baghdad)."

¶9. (C/NF) Prominent human rights lawyer Abdelaziz Nouyadi also told PolOff on December 31 that Moroccans were more upset than he had seen them in a long time. "There is a perception that this reaction is designed to strangle the people of Gaza, not achieve a military goal," he explained. He commented that many Moroccans also believe the Government of Israel (GOI) is attempting to present President-elect Obama with a "fait accompli" and force him into a policy corner before he even takes office. Nouyadi said that almost 200 attorneys from the Rabat Bar Association participated in

RABAT 00001204 003 OF 003

a sit-in on December 31 at the Appeals Court.

Additional Arab League Points Delivered

¶10. (C/NF) On December 31, PolOff delivered talking points conveyed in Acting A/S Feltman's December 30 e-mail to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Director of Humanitarian and Social Affairs Abdelmounaim El Farouq on December 31. He promised to personally and immediately deliver the message to MFA Chief of Staff Nasser Bourita, who was in a day-long meeting, for onward transmission to Minister of Foreign Affairs Fassi Fihri at the Arab League meeting in Cairo. El Farouq said that the Government of Morocco would be providing some type of humanitarian assistance to Gaza but did not know in what amount or form.

Berbers Also Speak Out

¶11. (C/NF) In an unusual move, the Berber Association for Human Rights, which has made no secret of its affinity for Israel and normally refrains from commenting on Israeli/Palestinian issues, issued a signed statement condemning the Israeli action as disproportionate. However, the Association was the only one to equally criticize HAMAS for breaking the truce and launching rocket attacks into Israel.

Comment

¶12. (C/NF) The level of rhetoric surrounding the Gaza attacks is in keeping with precedent but seems to have a sharper edge. The almost absolute lack of any mention of HAMAS's rocket attacks or breaking the cease-fire, coupled with horrific images of the aftermath of Israeli strikes, has created an almost monolithic wave of public revulsion and anger. The numbers of people participating in protests is hard to quantify, but the size and breadth of the events have increased with each day. The school closing is an unusual act and illustrates the depth to which the images have hit home. It is reasonable to expect more and larger actions on January 1 and in the new year if the situation continues in Gaza. End Comment.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Riley